



Messianic Jewish author David Brickner guides us through twelve prophecies from the Old Testament. Whether you're curious, skeptical, or a committed believer, this book is for you. Come and see how God's timeless plan to redeem and renew the world still shines as a beacon of hope today.

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CHAPTER 1

Why a Messiah?

My wife and I frequently have houseguests, and on one occasion we hosted a family that included an adorable three-year-old named Levi. He was curious about everything he saw—everything in our home was new and thought-provoking to him. And he kept asking me, “Why? Why? Why?” I found myself explaining why our dog Nola barked, why my hot tub water was hot, why the toast popped up out of my toaster, etc. I appreciated Levi’s questions and his hunger for understanding.

Sadly, as we grow older and busier, it’s easy to become less reflective about life. Our desire to understand life’s “whys” can be dampened by disappointment and disillusionment.

Don’t Stop Asking

When was the last time you seriously wondered, “What is wrong with the world? Why all the pain and suffering?” and then actually tried to discover the answer? It only takes a glance at

the daily news to provoke that question, but many have either stopped asking or have accepted prepackaged explanations. Politicians are especially good at blaming the opposition for all our problems, yet no matter who is in power, they are unable to prevent the pain and loss we all face at some point. Maybe it's a shattered relationship, the death of a loved one, a debilitating accident or illness, a broken heart for those suffering from war and poverty, or even an inexplicable sense of emptiness.

If we resign ourselves to the idea that “this is just the way things are,” we miss out on what could be. If we will open our minds to discovering the genesis of what has gone wrong in our world, God will show us his plan to make it right.

Whatever is wrong with the world, it is certainly not a new phenomenon. Jesus' early followers might well have wondered what went wrong after their hopes had been dashed as they watched him die on that Roman cross. But his astonishing return to life revealed that what had seemed like the ultimate defeat was the ultimate victory—a fulfillment of God's plan to fix what is wrong with the world.

The Problem and the Promise

The promise of a Messiah is inseparably intertwined with the root of all our problems—and so the problem and the promise both began to unfold at the very dawn of human history.

We see the first prophetic prediction of Messiah in the beginning chapters of the Torah, in Genesis 3:15.

“And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;

He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel.”

The context of this prophecy is the very first Bible narrative about human life, known as the story of the Garden of Eden. Most have heard this story. The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, were living in an exquisite garden that offered everything they needed to thrive, prepared for them by God himself. They were free to enjoy this garden paradise with one small provision: the fruit of one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was off-limits to them. God warned that the penalty for eating the fruit would be death.

Did the Punishment Fit the Crime?

Some may shrug or shake their heads at this, thinking the punishment far outweighed what might not seem like much of a crime. But it makes perfect sense if we see that the issue was not stealing a piece of fruit but rejecting God’s authority. Eating the fruit would essentially be telling God, “We don’t really believe you are the all-knowing, all-powerful, and loving God who has every right to set boundaries—and who does so for our good.”

If Adam and Eve were unwilling to trust and obey the Giver of Life who knew exactly what they needed to thrive, how could their lives be sustainable? Death would be inevitable. The crime and the punishment were actually two sides of the same coin—rejection of God.

Sadly, Eve did not resist the temptation to taste the forbidden fruit. She believed the devil, who appeared to her in the form of a serpent. He did not merely offer her the fruit, but told her that God’s warning was untrue, and insinuated that it was intended to hold her back from the life she deserved. She gave in to distrust,

and disobedience quickly followed. Adam did not refuse when she offered the fruit to him, and together they violated the only stipulation God had given them.

This event, often referred to as “the fall,” is the context for the Genesis 3:15 prophecy. God was addressing the serpent immediately after Adam and Eve had fallen to his temptation—and they overheard it all.

Hope Shines in the Dark

God was speaking into the darkest hour of their experience. All the innocence and all the goodness that God had given Adam and Eve and, by extension, the human race, seemed lost forever.

God was about to banish the couple from the Garden of Eden. He was about to tell them how their choice had spoiled much more than the intimacy they’d shared with him. Their lack of trust in God would infect their relationship with each other. They would face insecurity and oppression as husband and wife. Their rejection of God’s authority would affect their work, their living conditions—and pretty much all of nature. How could it not? Our experience of paradise comes apart at the seams when we pull away from the God who created it.

But before God pronounces these dark consequences to Adam and Eve, he speaks to the serpent, the one who had deceived them. And as he does, he gives this prophecy as a ray of hope to humanity.

Once again, God says,

“I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman [Eve], and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15 ESV).

How is this a ray of hope? How does it predict the solution to what is wrong with the world? It’s all about the offspring.

The Mysterious Seed

The word “offspring” in the Hebrew is *zera*, or seed. In other passages, the word *zera* is used to describe the essential male contribution to conceiving life. But in this promise, God specifically describes this future offspring as the seed of the woman! (For more on the meaning of this surprising turn of phrase see chapter 5.)

Somehow *her* offspring is going to be connected uniquely to the birth of someone who will bruise or crush the serpent’s head. Several (though not all) English translations say “bruise,” but in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the passage reads, “He shall crush your head.”¹

How do you kill a snake? You crush its head. Normally you would pick up a weapon to do this; it’s too risky to try to kill a serpent by stepping on its head. If you try to step on a poisonous snake, you most likely will be bitten.

Yet it seems that is exactly what the seed of the woman will do: crush the head of the serpent underfoot. And in the process of this crushing, his heel is going to be bruised or crushed as well. I take that to mean he will be bitten by the snake, a mortal wound.

We see in this promise that someone is going to come and put an end to the serpent, defeating the one who introduced the enmity that caused the fall and led to all the brokenness that resulted. The conquering hero would be the seed or offspring of a woman. Yet in the process of defeating Satan, the offspring would himself suffer a mortal wound.²

The word “Messiah” is not mentioned in Genesis 3:15; however, his coming is the piece that is needed to make sense of the story. That is why from early times, Jewish literature interpreted this passage as a promise of the Messiah. One of the Targums (ancient

paraphrases of the Scriptures in Aramaic) relates this verse to the Messiah.³

It makes sense that some Jewish traditions identified the offspring of the woman as none other than the promised Messiah, the one in whom all our best hopes for the future rest. And it is likely that Yeshua's early followers had heard and read that the promised Messiah was the one who would crush the head of their satanic adversary, but they hadn't yet understood how it was to occur.

Jesus opened their minds to see how he fulfilled this ancient promise. His death took on a new meaning as the seed of the woman who would bruise or crush the serpent's head . . . and so he began to reverse the curse from the Garden of Eden at the cost of his life.

In fact, Jesus' death was part of the very proof they needed to see that he was exactly who he claimed to be. His death crushed the plans of the adversary in a way that he never could have had he simply fulfilled his disciples' hopes and expectations. Jesus was able to restore the most precious thing that had been broken: the hope of a relationship between God and humanity.

Jesus would continue to share much more to open his disciples' minds, such as how and why Messiah's death had the power to redeem his people. We will continue to explore passages from the Jewish Scriptures, looking at passages I believe Jesus shared with his followers to help them put it all together. And as they put together the true meaning and scope of what Jesus had done, they were so filled with joy over the good news that they began to proclaim it in Israel and around the world.

Echoes of Genesis 3:15

At key points in the New Testament, we find allusions to Genesis 3:15. For example,

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman. (Gal. 4:4 ESV)

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (Rom. 16:20 ESV)

An early letter to Jewish followers of Jesus talks about him coming in the flesh so that through his own death, he could destroy Satan: “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14 ESV).

In Revelation, the very last book of the Bible, there is an allusion to a future and final war against “the offspring of the woman,” which will finish the crushing of Satan for good.

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Rev. 12:9 ESV)

Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. (Rev. 12:17 ESV)

Hope springs forth as a desperately needed light in the darkest of hours, and that’s exactly what Genesis 3:15 does. This prophecy provides the first of many strokes that, together, present

a wonderful portrait of the one who was promised from the very beginning—the seed of the woman, the Messiah.

Hope for Today

And today? The brokenness introduced by Satan's deception continues. People still believe lies about what God is like and reject his wise boundaries. As a result, we are all busy being deceived, deceiving ourselves and others, and covering up who we really are. But it doesn't have to be that way.

What is your hope in the darkness? The announcement of good news that came at the dawn of human history can still cut through the darkness we experience today. But it requires us to reject the deception, not only about God, but about ourselves.

I've heard it said that a newspaper article once invited readers to write an answer to the question "What is wrong with the world?" G. K. Chesterton purportedly wrote in reply:

"Dear Sir: Regarding your article 'What is Wrong with the World?' I am. Yours truly."

AND YOU?

I have come to the same realization as Chesterton. Have you? If you haven't, would you be willing to consider that we all reject God in one way or another, and have suffered the dehumanizing effects of doing so? It's liberating to be able to see and admit it. Because once we open our minds to our own part in what is wrong with the world, we can open our minds to the solution.

Now the LORD had said to Abram:

“Get out of your country,

From your family

And from your father’s house,

To a land that I will show you.

I will make you a great nation;

I will bless you

And make your name great;

And you shall be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,

And I will curse him who curses you;

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 12:1–3

Messiah would be a descendant of Abraham.

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